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SIPDIS

GENEVA FOR RMA
LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL
BEIJING PASS CHENGDU

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TAGS: PREF PTER PHUM PREL NP

SUBJECT: UIGHURS IN NEPAL

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski. Reasons 1.5 (b),(d).

¶1. (C) At least 15 Chinese Uighurs have entered Nepal in the last three months, according to a UNHCR protection officer (strongly protect). Six were taken into custody by Nepali officials in late December, 2001. Of these, four requested, and received, UNHCR protection. Three of the four were subsequently handed over to China. The fourth remains in custody along with two who did not request refugee status. The protection officer knows of approximately nine other Uighurs currently at large in Nepal and seeking UNHCR assistance. UNHCR maintains regular contact with these individuals.

¶2. (C) Some of the Uighurs interviewed by UNHCR were able to converse in Urdu. One group claimed to have engaged the services of a guide in China who smuggled them across the Chinese border into Nepal at Kodari, a route commonly used by undocumented Tibetans. Of the Uighurs who made refugee applications, all claimed to have been persecuted for their political beliefs by the Chinese government.

¶3. (S) At a diplomatic reception March 1, the UNHCR Representative to Nepal (protect) asked the Ambassador if he "knew about the Uighurs." UNHCR was aware of where these individuals had come from, the Rep acknowledged elliptically.

Comment: Post has heard rumblings about Uighurs from China entering Nepal, but UNHCR's remarks were the first public confirmation of this phenomenon. Given the Rep's demeanor and the fact that some could speak Urdu, we have strong suspicions that some of these Uighurs may have spent some time in Pakistan and/or Afghanistan. End Comment.

MALINOWSKI